

LOS ANGELES COUNTY VETERANS ADVISORY COMMISSION

2615 S. GRAND AVE., SUITE 100
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90007



United We Stand



Joseph N. Smith
Director

MINUTES REGULAR MEETING Wednesday, March 14, 2012

Present:

Absent:

Commissioners

Bob Archuleta, Chair
Carvel Gay, Vice Chair
Dave Culmer
Ramon Rodriguez
Stephanie Stone
Steve Rosmarin

Commissioners

Mark MacCarley
Fred Flores

County Department

Military and Veterans Affairs

Colonel Joseph Smith, Director
Tatiana Rosas, Executive Secretary

Call to Order, Pledge of Allegiance and Approval of Minutes

Chair Bob Archuleta called the meeting to order at 1:32 p.m., and thanked everyone for coming to today's meeting. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Dennis Kuewa, Director, Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) Los Angeles Regional Office. Commissioner Rodriguez motioned to approve the minutes and it was seconded by Commissioner Gay and they were approved unanimously.

Roll Call

As noted above.

Chairman's Report

Chair Archuleta thanked everyone for their participation and attendance at today's Commission meeting. Chair stated calls have started to come in for Memorial Day events and activities. This year Memorial Day is on Monday, May 28th he asked that everyone put this on their calendars' and attend the various festivities and events throughout the County. Chair reminded everyone that there are still units in Afghanistan in harms way. Of the Marines killed in the helicopter crash recently; he asked that everyone remember the men and women in uniform.

Comments from Audience (three minutes each)

Commissioner Rosmarin introduced Mitch McMurray, an Army veteran and new Veteran Representative at the West Los Angeles Home. Mr. McMurray stated there are 3 levels of care, Assisted Living, Residential Clinic for the Elderly in which they have 82 beds filled and a max of 84 beds. The Memory Care is about to open and lastly there is the Skilled Nursing Facility will open June or July 2012 will have 250 beds available. For more information, he suggested visiting them on the web at www.calvet.ca.gov.

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Mr. McMurray stated that there is a Live Scan process that all veterans applying to go to the Home need to pass. He explained that if a veteran has a felony that has been expunged it will still appear in the Live Scan. Each case will be dealt with on a case by case basis. Mr. McMurray stated that there are still applications waiting to be processed and the interviews will be take place at the end of March.

Commissioner Rosmarin commended Mr. Mitch McMurray for the tremendous job he does and the great care that he and the veterans receive at the Home. He also encourages everyone to tour the site and see first hand all the great benefits the Home offers to veterans.

Commissioner Rodriguez inquired as to how many sit on the Board and how many times does it meet. Mr. McMurray responded that the Board meets once a week. Also, rate is based on percentage not how much a veteran makes and there is a cap (approximately \$4,000). He also stated that there will be soon a barber shop available for residents and they are growing despite the budget restraints.

Bob Hope Patriotic Hall Renovation – Bill Gelpi

Mr. Bill Gelpi was unable to attend meeting. Colonel Smith stated that Mr. Gelpi was detained at another project he's working on for Public Works.

Chair Archuleta inquired if the projected date to return to Patriotic Hall was still the end of Summer. Colonel Smith responded that yes that is still the target time. He also stated that the parking structure will not start immediately after the opening of the building.

The Shakespeare Center of Los Angeles – Ben Donenberg & Kellogg Brengel

Mr. Ben Donenberg, the Founder & Artistic Director, The Shakespeare Center of Los Angeles, stated that there had been a full presentation made at last month's meeting. There had also been a request made about providing the Commissioners with a copy of the proposal which a copy was also handed out today; he is hoping for an endorsement by the Commission.

Chair Archuleta stated that he liked the idea of involving veterans in the theatre that veterans have so much talent to be behind the scenes as well as in front of the curtains. He spoke positively of all the opportunities the veterans can have being involved in all aspects of production. Chair Archuleta pointed out that on page 4 of the proposal there was a listing of the Advisory Committee including Mr. Tom Hanks, and Jay Morales, Post 8. Chair Archuleta expressed his enthusiasm as to how this program is coming together.

Commission Stone stated that it's still premature to have a Commission vote. The Commission should be time to review the proposal.

Mr. Donenberg explained that the proposal had been forwarded to Mr. Ralph Tillman and Jeff Blake for their review and for them to forward it up to their Director and committee. He stated that Mr. Tillman and Blake said the proposal was favorable and they were prepared to enter into an MOU that would be done on a seasonal basis. He emphasized that the VA would be in total control of the theatre even when they would be using it. He said that in the summer they would use the Japanese Garden and help with the maintenance and landscaping costs.

Commissioner Stone inquired as to how many veterans they envision hiring and Mr. Donenberg responded that it would be between 15-20 veterans either through supported employment or on a per production basis. Those that like the production field and want more education can be funneled into El Camino College and ultimately to the University of Santa Barbara.

Mr. Donenberg stated that he wants to take this program and make it into a model program for other VAs to then replicate in other venues through out the country.

Commissioner Rosmarin expressed his enthusiasm and stated that other veterans feel the program would be beneficial to other veterans. He stated that Lou Koff is in favor of the program starting at the West Los Angeles VA.

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Colonel Smith recommended that the Commission send a letter requesting that the Board of Supervisors write a letter of support endorsing the program especially since the Chairman of the Board is the Supervisor of that area.

Motion by Commissioner Stone and seconded by Commissioner Rodriguez to send a letter to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors to send a letter of support from Supervisor Yaroslavsky, Chairman in support of The Shakespeare Center of Los Angeles, Veterans in Art. Motion passed with all voting in favor.

Comments from Audience (three minutes each)

Jay Morales, retired Marine, Vietnam Veteran and Adjutant, American Legion, 17th District, Los Angeles Post No. 8, and stated that the veterans are losing in military and losing funding as well. Mr. Morales passed out a one-sheet with a prepared statement that he read to the Commission. The statement stated, "that a recommendation/proposal is being considered to consolidate all the current veterans organizations/groups into one central location in the basement of Patriotic Hall in order to better serve the veteran constituency of Los Angeles County. This recommendation is flawed, consolidation is a misleading method of promoting cost effectiveness, when I fact, it will lead to the eventual elimination of those few veteran service organizations which still remain as tenants."

He also stated, "The American Legion Los Angeles Post #8, charter tenant of this County veterans memorial hall will adamantly and vociferously, oppose any consolidation utilizing all public resources, social media and referendum petition to elected officials, on the grounds that it violates the purposes for which this historic structure was created. The consolidation plan recommended by the Director of Military and Veterans Affairs is in direct contradiction of the public statement read on Tuesday, October 3, 2006 at an official meeting of the Board of Supervisors stating that Los Angeles Post #8 would not vacate their office room #800 in the building in accordance with California Laws governing veterans memorial halls but would temporarily suspend operations for purposes of renovation."

Colonel Smith responded that there are collaborative agreements with other entities to provide services which the County cannot do by itself. The DoD, the Governor have all echoed the same concerns of many that the VA is overwhelmed by the amount of veterans coming into services. By instruction of the CEO of the County the veterans organizations that had been in the building were promised that they would return to the building but no promise was made as to returning to the same location and the amount of space they would be allocated. Space is based and allocated by the Public Works Building codes. Colonel Smith stated, "We recognize prior use by the American Legion, DAV, Jewish War Veterans and other veteran organizations and the County intends to honor its promise. We are also looking at upper floors for a One-Stop, with legal aid, social security, and Cal Vet Loans, it'll be a collaborative between the County, Department of Mental Health and US VETS, and this will be beyond what is already being done by the Navigator Program." Colonel Smith pointed out that there will be a large number of returning veterans, their spouses and dependants that would benefit from this venture. Colonel Smith stated that to have the veterans organization in one central area would be to get the synergy and outreach out to all veterans regardless of who they are and provide for collaboration for the community and other veterans.

Commissioner Culmer asked who would be occupying Patriotic Hall and Colonel Smith responded that the first priority is veterans and collaborative ventures to help veterans and their dependants and survivors; then other County Departments that need space for patriotic events, and activities.

Jay Morales stated that he's been very observant to what the Director has stated and responded, "that in 1924 the veterans filed a lawsuit for the purpose of the land and the building and it was deemed a California Veterans Memorial Hall." He stated that it's a veteran building and not a community service building; it belongs to the future that others will inherit. Mr. Morales stated that he was not opposed to the organizational structure of veteran organizations in the building. "We're going to be grouped and lumped together. The external organizations that once they're in the building will continue to serve veterans. That's the issue; the consolidation. Kenny Hahn warned about "consolidation leads to elimination."

Colonel Smith responded that the County intends to make the Building a true veteran building. To provide services for veterans like what New Directions provides at the VA. "The purpose is the exclusively help veterans; a One-Stop would be to help veterans with pro bono legal assistance. No recommendations have been made on what County Departments or in regards to the theatre proposal nothing on the use of the theatre at the Hall. "

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Commissioner Stone commented, "That recognizing this is a veteran building the basement may not be a good idea; it doesn't say much that we're putting our original veteran tenants in the basement."

Chair Archuleta stated, "We as a Commission are grateful to the County, the Board of Supervisor their support of the veterans. But we should never lose sight of what the building represents. I do remember that the use would remain the same. I don't see how consolidating everyone into the basement how it would help us - - but out of sight out of mind! I appreciate and trust Colonel Smith; and know that he's the man to carry out the plan and see us back in the building."

VA Long Beach Healthcare System – Alice Martinez

Rex Jennings, Chief of Voluntary Services, VA Greater Long Beach Healthcare System, stated Ms. Alice Martinez sends her regards and introduced Mr. Rob Decker, new employee to the VA. Mr. Jennings stated that there is also a theatre program underway at the VA which brings an alternative to therapy. They've also started a musical program called "Rock for Vets" that teaches veterans to sing. So far they have Gene Simmons who has confirmed his participation in the program. On April 10th there will be a benefit tour with the groups "Chicago and Oingo Boingo" to be televised and viewed in 80 other countries. Construction on the Blind Center has been completed and there is more parking available for the Primary Care but they are about maxed out. On April 10th and 11th the Fisher House will be coming and briefing them on how they will get started so they can start fund raising.

Veterans Home Support Committee – Steve Rosmarin

Commissioner Steve Rosmarin stated that they are still working on the paperwork to process the 501©3 form. He also reminded everyone that this year's motorcycle ride will be on September 23, 2012 and will be lead by Commissioner Culmer.

Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Report – Colonel Joseph Smith

Colonel Joseph N. Smith, Director, Military and Veterans Affairs provided the following report:

- Armed Services National Guard and Reserve components on active duty continue to decline...today's total is 71,897.
- Armed Services recruiting met or exceeded goals for all four active duty military branches....four of the six Reserve components met or exceeded their goals.... The Army National Guard achieved 94% and the Air National Guard enlisted 97% of their goals.
- VA has increased staffing 24% to meet the needs of 123,000 post deployment personnel while concurrently opening additional clinics. Additionally, the VA has its Mental Healthcare System to identify possible remedial requirements.
- Federal government can't keep up with Freedom of Information requests, copies of documents and Homeland Security requests.
- 4 of 5 Iraq/Afghan War Amputees Say "Life is Full" in VA Amputation System of Care Survey VA is already taking action to address some of the problems identified rehabilitation, long-term care and the need for more doctors/mental health professionals.
- March 24th the Annual Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Event will be held at Whittier High School's football stadium.

Looking ahead: Supervisors and VAC members will be invited on

- April 19th -- Veterans Business Network social event to identify/encourage business leaders to hire new veterans (officers/NCOs) (Chase Wickersham, US VETS Staff).

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- May 19th -- Annual Armed Forces Day Parade in Torrance – Tickets have been requested.
- May 26th -- Supervisor Antonovich's 15th Annual "Remembering Our Veterans and their Families Event at Arcadia Park from 10am to 3pm.
- May 28th -- Memorial Day – Board of Supervisors/Media List.

New Business

Commissioner Stone stated that one of her goals while she was Chair was the Department website. She's volunteered her time as well as James Maddox and provided information they researched to the Department on key issues that needed to be addressed in the website. If you are a veteran all you now have to do is enter your zip code and all the closest veteran organizations near you will come up. Commissioner Stone thanked the Department on the quality of work, the visuals, and the linking of organizations that will be available to help veterans on the website. There will be a page for the Commission, the meetings, the Commissioners bios, minutes, and Commissioners Face book pages or Twitter sites will also be available. The date of completion is the latter part of June but the Department has challenged themselves to get the website go live by mid May for Armed Forces Day.

Chair Archuleta stated that Colonel Smith has assembled all this information from all various components on a computer friendly site.

Commissioner Stone informed everyone that on March 20th is Women's Military History Week in Sacramento. A flyer was put in each Commissioners packet.

Item's for Next Month's Agenda

- Veterans Home Support Committee – Steve Rosmarin
- VA Long Beach Healthcare System – Rex Jennings or a representative
- Bob Hope Patriotic Hall Renovation Update – Bill Gelpi
- Commissioner Flores will invite two Veterans for April's meeting to offer the Invocation and lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

Good of the Order

Commissioner Culmer; stated he was going to fast forward the life tape. When everyone's a bit lighter in weight and in step and everyone is ignoring you because you're old. As you pass by Patriotic Hall and some one asks you if there are any veterans in the Hall; you can say, Yes they're in the basement!

Commissioner Rosmarin; Thanked Commissioner Stone for all she did for Bea Cohen's 102nd Birthday Celebration. Bea Cohen is now going to Sacramento to see the Governor. He will be going to Washington, D.C., and will be seeing the First Lady and make her an honorary National Commander. He received a call from Supervisor Zev Yaroslavy who named him "Volunteer of the Year."

Commissioner Stone; thanked James Maddox and Commissioner Culmer for their help with the website and for providing a greater awareness towards a better product. She stated that they were able to get Bea Cohen a letter of recognition from the First Lady. Also, there will be another Networking Breakfast sponsored by Goodwill and encouraged everyone to attend.

Commissioner Rodriguez; stated that the Vietnam Moving Wall will be going to Orange County. And reiterated what Rex Jennings said about the VA Long Beach parking lot it is packed. He was there for an appointment and it took him 1 hour to get his car valet parked.

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Vice Chair Gay; stated that he remembered when the Bob Hope Patriotic Hall refurbishment was beginning and he hates to see personalities change. "We have a job to do; let's do our job. Colonel Smith has a job to do for our veterans. Let's work together and let this happen. We're going to have a finished product soon. I hope the people appreciate what is being done."

Chair Archuleta; stated, "Thank you all. Remember March – May are very active months for veterans. Take time to see and touch the wall. Purchase a flag and take it home and put in at the front of your door. If you know a veteran say thank you for your service. Bob Hope Patriotic hall is extremely important and should be maintained as a monument to veterans. The Board of Supervisors must acknowledge it as I know they will. Look forward to the doors being opened and for us to go back in. On a personal note, his son has gone to Afghanistan with the 82nd Airborne. His second son is getting his Masters at George Washington University.

Motion to adjourn meeting by Commissioner Rodriguez and seconded by Commissioner Gay. Chair Archuleta adjourned meeting at 3:28 p.m.

Tatiana Rosas
Executive Secretary
March 14, 2012

Note: The next Commission meeting is scheduled to be held on Wednesday, April 11, 2012 at 1:30 p.m. in Suite 100 at the Department of Public Social Services site at 2615 S. Grand Avenue, Los Angeles, CA.